# Bulgarian national to be sentenced in UK over role in sprawling Russian spy network



In a significant case unfolding within the UK's espionage landscape, Katrin Ivanova, a 33-year-old Bulgarian national, is set to be sentenced alongside her co-defendants for their involvement in a Russian spy network. The intricate operations of this group, which reportedly operated on an "industrial scale," have been labelled one of the most complex enemy operations ever revealed on British soil. Their espionage activities spanned several countries, including the UK, Austria, Spain, Germany, and Montenegro, from August 2020 until early 2023.

Ivanova’s legal representation has argued that her role in the network starkly contrasts with classic espionage cases, such as that of George Blake, who, during the Cold War, infamously betrayed British national security. Her barrister, Rupert Bowers KC, noted that unlike Blake, Ivanova was not in a position of trust and acted without any knowledge that she was involved in activities that could harm the UK's interests. “The intention she had is a world away from that,” Bowers stated in court, emphasizing that Ivanova had been misled by her partner, Biser Dzhambazov, who was found at the centre of the operations in questionable circumstances.

The spy network, clandestinely orchestrated by alleged Russian operative Jan Marsalek, made headlines not only for its audacious aims but also for its peculiar methods. Members of the group were reportedly referred to as “Minions,” reflecting a bizarre juxtaposition with animated characters. They engaged in operations that included the high-profile kidnapping of individuals on British soil and even the use of drones to drop 100 litres of pigs' blood on the Kazakhstan embassy in London. This bizarre act, while unsettling, underscores the extreme lengths to which the network would go to achieve its aims.

Testimony from Ivanova herself revealed a degree of naivety in her understanding of her actions. She claimed to have believed she was assisting in the tracking of a fugitive wanted by Interpol rather than spying for a foreign power. This defence underscores a significant aspect of the case: the blurred lines of intention and awareness among operatives within sophisticated espionage networks.

As the legal proceedings unfold, further scrutiny has revealed that the network's activities not only threatened lives but also national security—a situation that has drawn widespread attention and condemnation from authorities. The prosecution painted a dire picture of the risks posed by such clandestine operations, which targeted individuals of strategic importance to the Russian state, including dissidents and military personnel.

The defendants now face potential sentences of up to 14 years, highlighting the serious implications of their actions. As the court prepares to pass judgment, the case continues to resonate within discussions on espionage, manipulation, and the grey areas that often cloud the intention behind covert operations.

As stories of modern espionage continue to emerge, Ivanova’s case serves as a reminder of the complexities associated with national security in an era where information is power, and the lines between right and wrong can sometimes become distressingly blurred.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: 1, 2
* Paragraph 2: 1, 4
* Paragraph 3: 1, 4, 7
* Paragraph 4: 3, 5
* Paragraph 5: 6
* Paragraph 6: 4, 6
* Paragraph 7: 1, 6, 7

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/female-russian-spy-world-away-from-classic-george-blake-case-court-told/a301040318.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/bulgarian-trio-convicted-conspiring-spy-russia> - On March 7, 2025, three Bulgarian nationals—Katrin Ivanova, Vanya Gaberova, and Tihomir Ivanchev—were convicted at London's Central Criminal Court for conspiring to spy for Russia. The trio engaged in surveillance activities across Europe between August 2020 and February 2023, targeting individuals and locations of interest to the Russian state. They utilized sophisticated methods, including fake identities and covert recording devices, and were financially compensated for their operations. Their activities were directed by Orlin Roussev, who received instructions from Jan Marsalek, an alleged Russian agent. ([cps.gov.uk](https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/bulgarian-trio-convicted-conspiring-spy-russia?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0lzk6xdwg1o> - Katrin Ivanova, one of the accused in a Russian spy ring, testified in court that she believed she was assisting in locating a fugitive wanted by Interpol. She claimed to have surveilled a Russian man in Montenegro, whom she believed was wanted for financial fraud. Ivanova, along with Vanya Gaberova and Tihomir Ivanchev, denies the charge of conspiracy to spy. The trial continues, with the defense arguing that Ivanova was unaware of the true nature of the activities. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0lzk6xdwg1o?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/7/russian-spy-ring-dubbed-the-minions-convicted-in-uk-court> - A London jury convicted three Bulgarian nationals—Katrin Ivanova, Vanya Gaberova, and Tihomir Ivanchev—of spying for Russia on an 'industrial scale.' The group conducted surveillance operations across Europe, targeting Russian dissidents, diplomats, and Ukrainian troops. The operation was directed by Orlin Roussev, with instructions from Jan Marsalek, an alleged Russian agent. The convicted individuals face up to 14 years in prison. ([aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/7/russian-spy-ring-dubbed-the-minions-convicted-in-uk-court?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/11/10/bulgarians-accused-of-spying-for-russia-to-face-trial-in-london-court-a83072> - Five Bulgarian nationals—Vanya Gaberova, Orlin Roussev, Bizer Dzhambazov, Katrin Ivanova, and Ivan Stoyanov—are set to face trial in London for charges related to conspiring to collect information useful to a foreign power. The defendants appeared via video link from prison, with the trial scheduled for the following year. Dzhambazov and Ivanova, a couple, and Roussev face additional charges of possessing false identity documents. ([themoscowtimes.com](https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/11/10/bulgarians-accused-of-spying-for-russia-to-face-trial-in-london-court-a83072?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-66923824> - Five individuals—Orlin Roussev, Bizer Dzhambazov, Katrin Ivanova, Ivan Stoyanov, and Vanya Gaberova—have appeared in a UK court, charged with conspiring to gather information useful to an enemy. The suspects allegedly conducted surveillance on individuals and locations targeted by Russia between August 2020 and February 2023. They did not enter pleas at Westminster Magistrates' Court and were remanded in custody. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-66923824?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/crime/met-police-interpol-reading-germany-old-bailey-b2711158.html> - Six members of a Russian proxy spy ring, dubbed the 'Minions,' are facing sentencing for their roles in one of the 'largest and most complex' enemy operations uncovered on UK soil. The group, including Bulgarians Katrin Ivanova, Vanya Gaberova, and Tihomir Ivanov Ivanchev, was found guilty at the Old Bailey of espionage activities that put lives and national security at risk. They will be sentenced alongside ringleader Orlin Roussev and others who admitted their roles. ([the-independent.com](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/crime/met-police-interpol-reading-germany-old-bailey-b2711158.html?utm_source=openai))